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ABSTRACT

In this paper the Transition, Inc. program of the city of Miami is examined. This program's main concern is to help ex-offenders in their re-socialization process by offering them moral as well as financial support. It is evidenced from the goal and objectives of the Transition, Inc. program, its rehabilitative results and related literature that programs of this nature and scope are needed to supplement the ongoing rehabilitative services of the established criminal justice system. Transition, Inc. uses volunteer community citizens, a Board of Directors, and eight committees to help ex-offenders re-enter society. It is recommended that community involvement play a vital role in the rehabilitation of ex-offenders in any efforts to decrease crime in today's society. (Author/HLM)

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An Exploratory Study of Transition, Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the main concerns of our society in the last decade has been the increase in crime and the inefficiency of the criminal justice system in dealing with this problem. The correction institutions or jails of the country are characterized by their over-crowdedness, bad treatment to the convicts, lack of hygiene, and other conditions all leading to a stage of despair and corruption of the inmates. Many are the cases in which we hear of prisoners hanging themselves in jail, female prisoners being raped by their custodians, or surprising offenders' declarations claiming that it is much easier to get drugs inside the jail than on the streets.

Hosford and Moss (1975) state that "recently there has developed an increased public concern about the role that prisons play in society. While many people are under the impression that correctional institutions act as rehabilitative agents of society, the fact refute this belief in the great majority of cases. Prisons, for the most part, are not rehabilitative, but custodial institutions designed primarily to separate the offender from the outside world....They exist primarily to punish the inmate and to isolate him from society....Fortunately, many people now realize that punishment per se does little to rehabilitate an individual. Support for this view is found in the high recidivism rate of

prior offenders as well as in the findings of correctional and experimental psychology."[1]

In fact, jail is considered the best school for crime and because of this reason new institutions have emerged within the criminal justice system: institutions concerned and trying to deal with the increasing rate of crime by rendering services to the inmate that may help him in his individual problems, providing a source of rehabilitation instead of corruption to the offenders.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem the author of this paper dealt with was to examine one of those rehabilitation institutions: Transition, Inc., which operates in the City of Miami.

PROCEDURE AND PROCESS OF GATHERING INFORMATION

Data gathering procedures were implemented utilizing the personal interview approach which included specific questions itemized by the author. In order to obtain a complete (valid

[1] Ray E. Hosford and C. Scott Moss, The Crumbling Walls; (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975) p. XII.

and reliable) scope of the program, the author personally interviewed the Executive Director, Volunteer Coordinator and five other volunteer staff of Transition, Inc.. Subsequent reviews of brochures, literature and case studies pertaining to this particular institution was done.

RESULTS

The data obtained by the author indicated the following:

1. Goal and objectives of Transition,Inc.

Transition, Inc. is a non-profit organization operating at 1150 S.W. 22nd Street, Miami, Florida since April, 1971. Its subtitle--the bridge between release and rehabilitation indicates, in general terms, the institution's goal and main concern. More specifically, this voluntary organization seeks to reduce the rate of crime in Dade County by helping the ex-offender in his/her process of resocialization to make the transition toward contributory citizenship supporting the rationale that 'to punish and not rehabilitate is the greatest crime of all against our society--contributing to the constantly increasing costs of the present cycle of arrest-conviction-imprisonment-release-re-arrest.'

In order to meet the above goal, the objectives of Transition involve concerned citizens of our community in the process of rehabilitation of the ex-offender by becoming an integral and dynamic part of the criminal justice system through Transition,

i.e., by becoming a Transition Volunteer.

2. Means implemented to attain goal.

The means utilized by Transition to achieve he desired goal and objectives of the program have been outlined by the Executive Director and program staff as follows:

A. Recruit, screen, train and match volunteers and assign them on a one-to-one basis with prisoners soon to be released. The volunteer and offenders are matched according to their individual interests, capacities and skills, in order to provide the basis for friendship, counseling, understanding and the feeling that someone cares.

B. Make full use of all community resources and programs to assist the offender towards a meaningful resocialization.

C. Assist the offender in locating housing and other supportive services.

D. Locate, develop and secure meaningful employment... the training, placement and job that would give the ex-offender the encouragement and incentive needed to make it on his own in society.

3. Roles of personnel.

At the present, the Board of Directors of Transition, Inc. has 39 members. The Board is composed of all officers, chairmen

of Standing Committees, the immediate past president of Transition, members of the Advisory Committee and three (3) individuals who have left any stage of the criminal justice system and appointed by the Board of Directors.

The primary duties of the Board are:

A. To conduct the routine business of Transition and to submit written reports to the general membership for ratification or other section.

B. To review all matters received routinely and refer some to proper committees, to the president for inclusion on the agenda for the next membership meeting, or if the matter is of such nature to be handled routinely, such action will be taken and reported to the membership. The Board will not take any action which is in conflict with action taken by the membership as a body.

Transition also has fifty (50) matching volunteers. These are, as it has been pointed out, concerned community members who offer not only professional skills but also a sense of empathy to the program and its clients. As described in the program's brochure, a Transition Volunteer "befriends, encourages, counsels and helps the freed criminal to forge a new life outside of jail."

The volunteers are assigned to perform different activities in the program according to their background and experiences, skills or preferences. They work on the various committees of the program helping get jobs, shelter, medical care, financial support etc. for the ex-offender. Raising funds and communicating with the community through the mass media are some other volunteers' tasks. Those willing to work directly with the inmates are trained and matched with the clients on a one-to-one basis and are urged to fulfill the following expectations:

A. Give a minimum of 4-6 hours a week.

B. Attend monthly in-service training sessions.

C. Contact office immediately with any questions concerning the client.

D. Make a weekly visit to incarcerated client. (If unable to attend, send a postcard to client explaining reason.)

E. Write a short but comprehensive report each week immediately after visit and turn it into Transition's office.

F. Aid client in securing needed services, i.e., employment, housing, clothing, professional counseling, etc.

G. When appropriate, contact the client's family to assist them in finding and securing whatever community aids may be necessary to keep the family functional, and may also assist the family in preparation for the client's release.

H. Encourage and aid client, when appropriate, to seek and utilize the services of drug or alcohol programs or mental health resources.

I. Cooperate in every way with any supportive agencies or programs in the work with the client.

J. Meet the client at time of release. If this is not possible, contact the Transition office.

K. Immediately contact and work with client's probation officer if one is assigned.

L. Continue weekly contact with client for approximately three (3) months after release.

M. Write a short report each week whether contact is made or not with the released client.

N. When appropriate, encourage the client to attend a Transition Training Session.

During the interview session held with the author, the Coordinator of Volunteers said that it was difficult for the program to get community members involved in Transition to work as one-to-one volunteers, specially among blacks, therefore the program only has six (6) black volunteers althought 50% of its clients are black. She further indicated that the role played by the volunteers is very important, specially if we take into account the fact that the social workers or probation officers of the correction institutions of Dade County have to handle as many as 125 cases at the same time.

4. Major subsystems.

Eight (8) committees can be identified within the organizational structure of Transition, Inc., each dealing with specific aspects of the program's objectives. The major sub-

systems are the following:

A. Volunteers Committee--Conducts recruitment, screening, training, and placement of volunteers interested in working with the program.

B. Visitation Committee--The volunteers aid the inmates through a one-to-one relationship. Volunteers usually visit their clients once a week in the ninety (90) days before their release. The relationship shall continue at least three (3) months following release.

C. Housing and Clothing Committee--The volunteers identify and provide emergency housing facilities on a temporary basis. Supportive services are to maintain clothing, help with medical care and obtain and place suitable publications for circulation in the jail and stockade.

D. Fund Raising Committee--This committee work in the membership campaing. The volunteers also provide and administer funds for temporary financial aid. They identify sources from charitable organizations, philanthropists, civic, business groups and individuals. They secure and deposit funds in the Transition account which will be used for the inmates being released and the ongoing operation of the program.

E. Meaningful Employment Committee--The volunteers locate, develop and secure meaningful employment opportunities for the released offender.

F. Legislation Committee--The volunteers continue the on going re-evaluation and planning o. the goals, objectives and functions of Transition, Inc., studying and recommending action - local, state, national.

G. Public Relations Committee--The volunteers appear on radio and TV to acquainte the community with the program. They also work with the press.

H. Speakers Bureau Committee--The volunteers speak to local groups on behalf of Transition.

5. Services to the community.

Transition is directly aimed to serve our community by decreasing the rate of crime in Dade County. As it is well known, 3 out of 4 offenders become repeaters once they are released, commiting new crimes and going back to jail. This trend is due to the lack of facilities faced by the ex-offenders once they are released, mainly the impossibility to get a job. Most of the ex-offenders have no education or vocational training, no money and no place to go when they leave the correctional institution. These conditions along with the hostility they find in the community are the main reasons of their repeated crimes.

Transition's clients are selected from those repeaters whose sentence elapses from 1 to 12 months, most of them involved in charges dealing with drug abuse and alcoholism among men, and prostitution and shoplifting among women. Most clients are members

of minority groups and belong to the poorest sections of the county, have not completed high school and had no job at the time they were arrested. Ages range 19-26 years old. The clients, pre-screened by professional personnel, accept the help offered by the program. They are visited by the one-to-one volunteer on a weekly basis working along with him and a probation officer of the correctional institution on the solution to his/her problems. The clients are usually placed on probation, and for a period of three months they continue to visit with the matching volunteer. Transition provides for individual counseling, clothing, job placement and emergency funds to the releasee. The program uses referrals in those cases where professional counseling, education and/or vocational training and housing (for men) is needed. However, the program faces serious difficulties trying to find jobs for their clients, and has no facilities to provide housing for women.

Through the services rendered by this institution, the ex-offenders are helped to become law abiding citizens. As of 1975, Transition had helped 250 felons (male and female) and even though no formal research study for the assessment of this program has been conducted, the 1975 statistics show that from 96 clients they had during the last year, six (6) were re-arrested; fifteen (15) they lost contact with, and seventy-five (75) are going to school, working or looking for a job. And of 100 offenders Transition worked with in 1974, only six (6) have been re-arrested.

6. Connection to other institutions.

Transition is a member of the Comprehensive Offender Program, by which it is funded through a federal grant.

It works in connection with other institutions of the criminal justice system, mainly the Dade County Correction and Rehabilitation Centers and the Treatment Alternative Straight Program (TASP): a rehabilitation program operating in the jails and through which Transition gets most of its clients.

The Halfway Houses, also funded by the Comprehensive Offender Program provide housing for the Transition male clients.

Other referral institutions are:

a) Manpower--Helps provide jobs.

b) Alcohol and drug abuse agencies-Provide professional counseling.

c) Department of Vocational Rehabilitation-To provide skills to the unskilled ex-inmates, and

d) Jackson Memorial Hospital-for medical services.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Studies in the fields of the criminal justice system reveal the concern about the bad conditions existing in the correctional institutions of the country and the need to implement programs

facilitating the improvement of such a situation. As stated by Moos (1975) "life in many institutions is at best barren and futile, at worst unspeakbly brutal and degrading...the conditions in which (inmates) live are the poorest possible preparation for their successful reentry into society and often merely reinforce in them a pattern of manipulation and destructiveness."[2]

The March 1973 Correctional Association of New York Newsletter indicated that "the principal concern and priority of effort of the correctional association of New York...has been to bring about the rehabilitation of offenders through the improvement in the operation of correctional institutions and the formulation and implementation of more humane conditions and effective programs."[3]

Emphasis has been put on the fact that the correctional institutions usually help to increment the offender's criminal behaviour instead of helping in his process of rehabilitation, thus the need of creating programs to meet this deficiency.

2 Rudolf H. Moos, Evaluating Correctional and Community Settings (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975), p.233.

3 Recommendations to the 1973 Legislature, The Correctional Association of New York Newsletter, January-March, 1973, p.1.

Hosford and Moss (1975) indicate that "if we are to rehabilitate an individual effectively, we must help him acquire the kind of knowledge and skills that he will need in order to be a useful member of society. To accomplish these goals, correctional programs need to be implemented which are designed specifically to help inmates respond appropriately to the variety of problem situations which they will encounter during and after incarceration. To be effective, i.e., to rehabilitate the inmate to the point that he will not engage in subsequent antisocial bahavior, such programs must set as their objective not punishment (because it does not work) but results that are related specifically to the kinds of personal, social, and vocational skills these individuals need to learn in order to function successfully and appropriately in society."[4]

Many programs and organizations have been created with this purpose and objectives, like Transition, Inc.. Davies (1974) states that "among recent developments in this area have been the opening and establishment of specialist after-care units in some major urban areas, the creation of a special fund by the Government to subsidize the capital cost of providing hostel accomodation for homeless ex-prisoners and the corresponding increase in the availability of such hostels, and the use by probation officers of voluntary associates in an attempt to

[4] Hosford and Moss, op. cit., p. XII.

increase the amount and intensity of work possible with men both before and after their release."[5]

Barr (1971) stated that "volunteer organizations and individual volunteers have begun to work out new forms of partnership with the statutory services and to redifine their roles. Perhaps the most significant trend has been the growing awareness that the probation alone and unaided cannot offer the range of provisions needed if the ex-prisoner is to have effective help. Thus, greater effort must be made to explore ways in which the resources of the community can be mobilized. Many small-scale projects have been launched in various parts of the country under the auspices of either the statutory or the voluntary organizations."[6]

Moos believes that "more than 70% of all offenders can probably be treated in the community, although some may need short term community-oriented confinement." He further points out that "Alternatives to institutionalization include non-residential work and/or group therapy programs, vocational and academic educational programs; and a variety of prerelease and early release options such as work furlough programs and family visitation programs. There are also intensive non-residential

[5] Martin Davies, Prisoners of Society, (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p.37.

[6] Hugh Barr, Volunteers in Prison After-Care, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971), p. 19.

communtiy programs such as halfway houses and day care and out-patient clinics....The number and importance of these programs has greatly increased in the past decade. For example, Griggs and McCune (1972) report that at least 27 states and the District of Columbia have state-financed community treatment programs for adult offenders."[7]

Among the many programs launched in this country we could cite the Essexfields program which attempts to reduce conformity to delinquent peer-determined norms and to encourage the development of new pro-social norms and behavior patterns. The Provo experiment which used guided group interaction and work in the community in a nonresidential setting. The Notre Dame Youth Center of Gary, Indiana, a halfway house for parolees from a state reformatory for older juvenile offenders which provide vocational development as well as counseling and supervision and job placement to its client.

Researchers in the field have conducted studies on the results of these recently implemented programs to assess the effectiveness of their techniques on the rehabilitation of the offenders, pointing out their positive and negative aspects. Moos found that in a study conducted on the Provo experiment mentioned earlier in this paper, two major findings stood out.

[7] Moos, op. cit., pp. 233-234.

First, when pre and post programs delinquency rates were compared, there were significant reductions in every program, including incarceration. Second, the reductions were greater for the boys who remained in the community than for the ones who were in prison. Other studies have demonstrated that the maintenance of close community ties, the close and informal relations among the clients and the staff, and the lack of complicated bureaucratic procedures are positive characteristics of these programs.

Other authors, however, have severily criticized these institutions. Bagdikian and Dash (1972) state that "community-based programs, allowing convicts back onto city streets before their sentences are completed, have met with harsh criticism from the Metropolitan Police Department and officials of the District government and Justice Department as well as private citizens. The central issue is new crimes committed by convicts while participating in community-based programs."[8]

Studies conducted on the halfway houses have been somewhat contrasting but with some inclination to positive results. Moos indicates that "Grygier et al. point out that halfway houses may offer financial security, vocational help, and general encouragement and moral support. However, they also allow for a concentration of offenders, which reinforce rather than reduce criminal values and patterns of behavior."[9]

[8] Ben H. Bagdikian and Leon Dash, The Shame of the Prisons, (New York: Pocket Books, 1972), p.137.

[9] Moos, op. cit., p. 237.

According to Bagdikian and Dash, "the central argument about halfway houses is simply not answerable now. Defenders say, in effect, that almost all convicts will be back in society one day, that halfway houses appear to reduce the incidence of repeated offenses and that, therefore, society is better served by such efforts to re-integrate the inmate into the outside world. Critics, in effect, base their case on the simpler truth that halfway house residents couldn't commit any of these crimes if they were still in jail."[10]

Although much literature has being devoted to explaining the need and feasibility of community-oriented programs and of the services rendered by volunteer community members, the fact remains that the effort they put forth to help the ex-offenders in their process of rehabilitation is being hindered by a suspecious and hostile atmosphere created around them. Consequently, this action often excludes the ex-prisoners from fully participating in the ongoing activities of our society thus becoming a social handicap. Wicker (1973) indicated that "a survey by the Georgetown University Law Center has found, for instance, that a third of all state and local governments and about 40 percent of American cities can and do rule out job applicants for being "unfit", without further definition; about 20 per cent exclude persons guilty of "infamous" or "disgraceful" conduct; and a tenth of the states and 20 per cent of all counties and

[10] Bagdikian and Dash, op. cit., p. 137.

cities exclude persons for specific criminal offenses. There are, moreover, more than 4,000 occupation licenses required in one state or another, and the same survey found that in about half of these a criminal record--sometimes a mere arrest record--can be exclusionary. Nor is there necessarily any relation between a state's correctional goals and its licensing requirements, or private hiring practices within its jurisdiction. A prison-trained electrician may be released to find that he cannot get an electrician's license or join the electrician's union. Want to be a barber? That's tough for ex-offenders in 43 states that require their barbers to be of "good moral character." Thirty-eight states make the same requirement of dental hygienists and 49 states demand it of morticians; 19 states specifically preclude the latter occupation to those with felony convictions, and ten rule it out for those with misdemeanor records.

Private business is not so easily surveyed, but a 1966 study in Minnesota--probably typical--found that 40 per cent of 983 firms were reluctant to hire ex-offenders, and another 28 per cent would hire them for specific jobs only....This is a subject of increasing interest to organizations like the National Law Office of the National Legal Aid and Defender Association, which are trying to do something realistic about crime in America. It belabors the obvious to say that if men coming out of prison cannot find jobs because they have been in prison, the society that refuses to hire them only insures

that many will offend again, and return to prison to repeat the vicious cycle."[11] Unfortunately, this is the situation faced by the ex-inmates, and these statistics explain why it is so difficult to programs like Transition, Inc. to meet their ex-offender job placement objectives, and to function fully and effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the collected and analysed information on Transition, Inc., and on the one exposed by the various authors cited in the review of literature, the author of this paper suggests that the following recommendations be implemented in Transition, Inc.:

1. That more effort be put forth to involve more community volunteers--specially blacks--in the rehabilitation process of inmates and ex-offenders (Public Relations and Speakers Bureau Committees.)
2. That funds be obtained from the local and state governments to supplement the federal allocations to Transition, Inc.
3. That government agencies should take a closer look at

[11] Tom Wicker, "Ex-Inmates Sing the Blues", New York Times, March 20, 1973.

and revise some of the policies and procedures that discriminate against the ex-offenders in an effort to increase their possibilities of rehabilitation.

4. That the goals and objectives of the Transition program be continuously evaluated and revised to render the most appropriate rehabilitation services possible to the ex-offender.
5. That more community awareness sessions (workshops, TV, radio, newspapers) be held to acquaint the Dade County community members with their responsibility and role they should play in the rehabilitation of the ex-offenders.
6. That a more intensive study of the Transition program be conducted involving a large sample of ex-offenders served by Transition and the personnel rendering the voluntary services.

SUMMARY

In this paper the Transition program of Miami has been examined. This program's main concern is to help the ex-offenders in their re-socialization process by offering them moral as well as financial support.

It is evidenced from the goal and objectives of Transition program, its rehabilitative results and related literature that programs of this nature and scope are sincerely needed to supplement the ongoing rehabilitative services of the established criminal justice system.

Community involvement should play and must play a vital role in the rehabilitation of ex-offenders if we are to practice the commitment that we preach in our efforts to decrease crime in our society.

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